

“SEA-TECTIVES”

AN ANIMATED SHORT FILM

A CREATIVE PROJECT

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

I have always had the desire to develop and animate my own short films. My projects until now have been smaller scale animations centered on a single punchline; I now strive to create something bigger. I researched the traits that compose a good story, as well as how to produce one. Animation is a difficult medium to master as it takes time and practice, and *Sea-Tectives* is both the culmination of those studies. This film is the result of months of work that has helped to develop my skills as both a storyteller and an animator.

The initial story that I developed was about a mouse who returns to his homeland after many years to overthrow an evil maniacal cat who has enslaved his people. That story was inspired by some of my favorite animated films that I watched in my youth, such as Don Bluth's *An American Tail*, which I refer to as "mouse movies." A mouse movie can be defined as any movie that depicts a world, or civilization, below the surface of the human world. These types of stories have always stirred my imagination. Of course, this story never made it past the storyboard stage but it planted the seeds for an idea I developed about a duo of detectives who happen to be sea creatures.

Sea-Tectives is a ten minute, animated short film about detectives in an underwater city, inspired by the detective fiction genre pioneered by various book and television series such as, *Sherlock Holmes*, *The Hardy Boys*, *Nancy Drew*, and *Scooby Doo, Where Are You?* The film also draws upon the visual styles and motifs that are reminiscent of film noir in the 1940s and transplants them into the context of a city deep within the ocean depths.

The story is told from the perspective of Orville Sinclair, a clam, who is writing a book about his final case with his crime-solving partner, Charlemagne Clawes, who is described in the

film as “the greatest detective mind in the sea.” The duo faces a seemingly unsolvable case of disappearances and must solve it while dealing with their differing views on celebrity and responsibility. Orville prioritizes the progression of their brand and image in order to preserve their livelihood, while Charlemagne rejects their growing fame as a distraction that prevents them from accomplishing their true duty as detectives. This division threatens to tear apart their partnership and friendship, but ultimately each sees the value of the other’s view which leads them to come together to solve the great crisis that threatens their world.

The “mouse movie” idea is still at the heart of this film, even though there are no mice. *Sea-Tectives* depicts a world literally beneath the surface of the human world. In fact, this particular underwater society has never encountered the human world until the events of the film. The overarching mystery that Charlemagne and Orville must solve is “who is kidnapping all of the fish in the city?” Similarly to how European societies throughout history believed that the world was flat, the truth at which Charlemagne and Orville arrive to is only as good as the context of the world around them. To the viewer, the obvious culprit is revealed to be fishermen in a boat overhead. However, to the fish, and our heroes, they do not know what to think about a giant craft floating above the surface of their world; they have never seen anything like this before. Their only conclusion is that it is some sort of extraterrestrial invasion, and it is in these moments of misunderstanding where I inject comedy into the story. To the human viewer, the duo’s conclusion that there is an alien invasion occurring is wrong, but they still act upon that conclusion because that is their truth, and it is the only truth their limited field of vision can allow.

The production is divided into three distinct phases: the script phase, the storyboard phase, and the animation phase. The script phase was crucial to putting the plot and ideas on

paper, and the story progressed through several drafts. The initial draft contained three detectives, instead of two, and was more of what I would call a “random comedy” that lacked a consistent story arc. It had humorous gags but no spine, and was more akin to an animation that one would watch on Cartoon Network’s adult swim block of programming. This was ultimately not the kind of film I wanted to make.

I began to think about what makes a good detective story and found myself researching detective fiction and film noir. Serialization was a common theme that I found throughout detective fiction and it occurred to me that this could serve as a good foundation for my story. For example, the original *Sherlock Holmes* series, written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, was very popular in the early twentieth century and told through the written voice of Dr. Watson over the course of several stories. Furthermore, *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew Mysteries* contain hundreds of cheaply produced books to maximize profits.

This idea of serialization and the hyper commercialized nature of mystery fiction is a concept that I have not seen addressed in other detective films or parodies and I believe my story is unique in this manner. Similarly to how contemporary book franchises, such as *Harry Potter* and *Twilight*, have spawned legions of faithful fans and blockbuster success for their respective authors, the foundation of my story is rooted in the fame achieved from the mass production of detective novels. I achieve this by depicting Orville as the author of a widely popular and kitschy book series, which spans hundreds of volumes about their many adventures. I take this concept further to the point where Charlemagne Clawes is driven mad because he cannot walk down the street without seeing his image plastered over every store window. Charlemagne can no longer exist in this world as he once could before their popularity, and this frustrates him as an

investigator who values his work as is his life. This philosophical debate drives the narrative of my story.

With the foundation of the story settled, the production moved forward into the storyboard phase. It was in the storyboarding phase that translating the script to a visual medium allowed me to view the how the story flowed, as well as single out what worked and did not work. To achieve this, I created an animatic to sequence the storyboards in video form with an audio soundtrack; this allowed me to view the storyboards as if it were the film itself. The animatic is crucial to perfecting the editing, timing, and scene progression. In a studio setting, the animatic would be distributed to the animator for animation, but in the case of *Sea-Tectives*, I was the sole animator on the project. The more storyboarding information, and detail, that is developed in the animatic, the less improvisation and guesswork the animator has to do. This allows the film to have a strong level of consistency because the animation should match the animatic, frame-by-frame, as close as possible. In the case of *Sea-Tectives*, I had already ironed out many of the story problems in the script stage; therefore, I was able to focus more of my attention on the editing and scene progression. The actual story from a plot standpoint required very little revision.

I began the animation production phase at the conclusion of the storyboarding phase in May 2016. It was crucial to outline and plan the amount of animation that I would have to produce each week in order to give myself goals to finish the film by the following April. I required two hundred and thirty frames of animation a week in order to meet my deadline. This weekly plan has allowed me to stay vigilant and on task. I also have each shot numbered and sequenced in my animatic for organizational purposes. To achieve animation, I use a combination of software packages in order to create a finished shot. I draw the rough sketches

and clean up the line work in Adobe Animate CC, I paint each background in Adobe Photoshop and composite the elements together in Adobe After Effects. Whenever I animate a shot, I insert it into a final composition in Adobe Premiere CC. These programs have helped modernize the animation process by allowing the animator to create the animation digitally. Without these programs, I would have had to draw each drawing by hand with physical materials and I would have had to photograph each drawing on film to create an animation sequence. These digital mediums have revolutionized the industry by allowing every part of the production to be created on the computer. The result of modernizing and simplifying the animation process has led to an increase in production speed and quality.

I have never created anything quite like *Sea-Tectives* in terms of scale, content, or complexity. This production serves to accomplish my goal of creating my own short films. What makes this film unique from other films is that it is injected with my own brand of humor and storytelling. Mass audiences have yet to experience my creations, and will be able to for the first time. This is what really excites me as an animator, filmmaker, and storyteller and drives me to continue to excel and progress my work as an artist.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

My films have a variety of influences that help define the style and aesthetic of my work. Visually, I gravitate towards the cartoons of Genndy Tartakovsky because of how his animation style resonated with me as a child. Tartakovsky is a Russian born animator and director who is one of the premiere faces of animation for the Cartoon Network. As an immigrant, he constantly found himself struggling to fit in but found his niche through comic books and television cartoons. His experience growing up was very different from mine but I have always related to his struggle to find acceptance, as well as his love for art and his desire to create. Tartakovsky never considered himself the best artist compared to his peers and would say, “I couldn’t believe how good some people were at eighteen... I was twenty, and I couldn’t draw anywhere near as well as they could. But it wasn’t in my nature to quit, so I worked three times as hard.”¹

The strength of his work ethic is a quality of Tartakovsky has always inspired me as an animator. His cartoon *Samurai Jack* (Fig.1) is a huge influence on my work. As a child, I knew the show looked amazing but I could not define why that was. As an animator, I know that it is the colorful watercolor background paintings and the lack of drawn outlines on the characters that gave the show a unique look that I had never seen before in any of the other cartoons of my youth. Creating an animation that visually strikes the audience is very important to me and I want the audience to have the same reaction to my films as I did towards Tartakovsky’s cartoons.

My animated pieces and stories center around animal characters thrust into human roles and experiences. Many times the characters seamlessly inhabit these human roles. An example of this is a film I directed, *Sealed with a Kiss* (fig.2), which is about two orca whales who are on a date at a fancy restaurant. Much of the comedy comes from seeing these animals personified into

¹ Wilkinson, Alec, “Moody Toons: The King of the Cartoon Network.” *The New Yorker*, May 27, 2002, p. 79.

human roles while still exhibiting traits that are symbolic of their animal nature. It is only when the male whale presents his date with the gift of a fluffy and delicious baby seal that their animalistic urges are unleashed. It is only at this point in that film that the audience is reminded that these characters are wild animals.

My stories rely heavily on a theme of viewer perception versus the character's perception. The worlds within the stories that I create have their own rules detached from our own real world. From an audience perception, a whale would never eat at a fancy restaurant. However, in the world of *Sealed with a Kiss* this might happen all the time. Conversely, the whale would never think or believe that his behavior is irregular and is going to continue to act and make decisions as if he does not have an audience watching. The rules of this whale's world make sense to him; this is the character's perception. So where I find humor, as both the animator and audience, is through seeing events in the character's world play out.

This is also a common theme in my thesis film *Sea-Tectives* (fig.3). In this film, the characters are sea creatures and live in their own sea society, or "sea-ciety," and have their own perception of the laws of nature within their realm. The fish have no idea what they are up against when a fisherman's boat is the genesis of the fish abduction mystery; they come to the conclusion that it is some sort of alien invasion. Their conclusion is incorrect in the context of the audience's perception of the world, but in their world that is simply the answer they arrive at. As the animator and storyteller, I inject humor into these moments because I want the audience to have solved the mystery but still want to see the characters arrive to a solution in their own way.

The television program *South Park* on Comedy Central is one of the programs that has inspired this theme of perception. *South Park* is notorious for its brand of humor and satire.

Personally, the funniest *South Park* moments are where the characters of the show display a limited and ignorant perception of a truth of which the audience already is aware. A strong example of this is in the 116th episode of *South Park*, titled “Awesom-O” (fig.4). In this episode, the character Cartman decides to dress up as a robot from Japan, named Awesom-O, to fool his classmate, Butters, into revealing embarrassing secrets about himself. The costume Cartman creates is crudely constructed from cardboard boxes, toilet paper rolls, and an assortment of miscellaneous crafting materials. Eventually the United States military discovers that there is a “robot” in *South Park* and kidnap Cartman to turn him into a weapon.

The creators of *South Park*, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, have previously indicated this episode was one of their favorite episodes they ever made.² What made that episode humorous was that it was extremely obvious that Cartman was not a robot. His costume had a similar quality to cardboard box fort that any child could create. However, through their ignorance, the United States military would not believe that it was just a boy in a costume; they genuinely believed that the robot was a sentient and dangerous machine. Again, perception is the driving force of the humor and it comes at the expense of the characters. The viewer watches as the characters bumble about their world believing their truth to be fact even though the audience already understands what the correct truth is. Much of the humor that I utilize in my work is directly influenced by those ideas.

Perception is also a hallmark that I have observed of detective fiction in general. In the case of stories like *The Hardy Boys*, *Nancy Drew*, and even cartoons like *Scooby Doo Where Are You*, the goal of the audience in each episode is to find out whom the perpetrator is through the clues presented in the episode as well as through a selection of characters who are possible

² Trey Parker and Matt Stone, “Creator Commentary: Awesom-O,” *South Park Studios* video. 01:46. Posted by *South Park Studios*. Posted June 2, 2004. <http://southpark.cc.com/clips/6nov1x/creator-commentary-awesom-o>

suspects. The audience achieves this through observing the characters work the case out through investigation. The audience experience is separate from the character's experience, even though both are working to achieve the same goal. My film is a comedic take on detective fiction. My film is influenced by, and parodies, the tropes and archetypes of this genre. An essential part of the writing process was researching the elements that compose a good detective story. The question I had to ask myself is what these stories have in common.

The largest influence on any detective story could widely be traced to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* series of books, such as *A Study in Scarlet* (fig.5). Understanding his life and process was illuminating to say the least. A key piece of trivia was that he did not particularly enjoy writing the *Sherlock Holmes* Stories. Carl Rollyson writes about Doyle's views on his creation:

Arthur Conan Doyle wrote the Holmes stories mainly to earn money. He did not think of them as serious works of art and was somewhat dismayed at their success. He had apparently stumbled on a formula that would hold the readers of the new mass-circulation magazines that catered to urban readers educated in the public schools of the late nineteenth century. For much of his professional career he felt ambivalent about his creation.”³

It is interesting how an author could be so detached and indifferent towards the phenomena that he created. This also illustrates how the intended audience of a detective fiction work is for the masses; these stories are intended to be an easily accessible and cheap entertainment that anybody could pick up and read. As commercial printing methods were innovated, the serialization of detective fiction increased.

The Hardy Boys books, such as *The Tower Treasure* (fig. 6), perfectly exemplifies the mass serialization of detective fiction. Edward Stratemeyer, the founder of the Stratemeyer

³ Rollyson, Carl. *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction* (Pasadena, California: Salem Press, 2008), 531.

Syndicate, created these books. In an article from *The Atlantic*, Daniel A. Gross describes the Stratemeyer Syndicate as a collective of freelance writers whose “central aim was simply to produce a huge number of books at the lowest possible cost.”⁴ Gross continues to explain the process of how the Stratemeyer Syndicate employed ghostwriters to write the books:

“Writers signed away their rights to royalties and bylines in exchange for a flat fee. (Early on it was around \$100 per book.) The Syndicate launched dozens of series, guessing that only a few would be hits. It debuted *Tom Swift* in 1910, followed by *The Hardy Boys* in 1927, and *Nancy Drew* in 1930. That same year, Stratemeyer died in New Jersey, by then not so much as a writer as a tycoon.”⁵

These authors, who signed away their rights to be identified as the authors of the *Hardy Boys* books, went by the pseudonym Franklin W. Dixon.⁶ Stratemeyer also retained all of the copyrights to the stories and left the anonymous authors with a one-time payment per book.⁷ This was an ingenious business plan for the time that was designed to produce as many books as possible, while making as much money as possible, while also keeping the production costs as low as possible. The result is that these books read as hollow entertainment completely detached from their creators.

I find myself drawn to the mass produced quality of the books and identify that as a commonality throughout detective fiction. Another common thread that I have noticed while perusing my own collection of *The Hardy Boys* books is that there is no definitive end game to the narrative. The next book in the series continues onward, oblivious to the events of the previous book. This is opposed to a book series like *Harry Potter* in which each book of the

⁴ Rollyson, Carl. *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction* (Pasadena, California: Salem Press, 2008), 531.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Zumoff, J. A. *Reviewed Work: The Secret of the Hardy Boys: Leslie McFarland and the Stratemeyer Syndicate by Marilyn S. Greenwald*, *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 2 (2005): 589-90.
<http://www.jstor.org.proxy.bsu.edu/stable/3790808>. (Accessed October 16, 2016)

⁷ Ibid.

series is part of an all-encompassing story arc; all of the plot threads were addressed and brought to a conclusion by the seventh and final book in that series. However, with the *Hardy Boys* series there is no clear ending to the saga; the series is written to spawn more and more books.

Additionally, this method of writing continues to relate to the previous works of Doyle and one could argue that the Sherlock Holmes books brought the beginning of this style of writing. Ed Wiltse would write about the subject:

Doyle's invention suggested an alternative to precisely the rise and fall narrative structure that has characterized most accounts of the Victorian serial... Unlike even the longest-running serial publications, which could eventually be counted upon to end, the Holmes stories, individual self-contained "adventures within a continuous diegetic frame, were potentially infinite."⁸

To Doyle's dismay, his attempts to end the Sherlock Holmes series with the death of the principle character in *The Final Problem* ended in failure. The continued popularity of the character would always force him to bring Sherlock back from the dead and write new stories. Therefore, the never-ending narrative of the Sherlock Holmes stories is not quite as intentional but necessary to facilitate the desire for more stories.⁹

Nevertheless, there is humor present in these never-ending commercial franchises. While browsing through *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories no. 5: The Secret of Shadow Ranch* by Carolyn Keene (fig.7), which was the pseudonym for an anonymous ghostwriter, one would stumble upon this text in the story:

Nancy's father, Carson Drew, a famous lawyer, had given his consent to the trip, but had asked his daughter to delay her departure for a week in order to do some work for him. Previously Nancy had helped him solve *The Secret of the Old Clock*. It was her first case

⁸ Wiltse, Ed. "'So Constant an Expectation': Sherlock Holmes and Seriality." *Narrative* 6, no. 2 (1998): 105-22. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.bsu.edu/stable/20107142>.

⁹ Rollyson, Carl. *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction* (Pasadena, California: Salem Press, 2008), 531-532.

and had led to many other dangerous assignments, the most recent of which was *The Mystery at Lilac Inn*.¹⁰

The book comically, and shamelessly, references two previous books in the series with the intent of making sure the reader goes out and buys the other stories. It is humorous to me to read these subliminal advertisements in the twenty first century because it is obvious that these are just that, advertisements. In that period, however, one could view it as genius marketing.

Through these observations, it became clear that the mass serialization and commercialization of mystery stories was an element of detective fiction that I would parody as the spine of my story. Character archetypes of detective fiction would be the vehicle that would allow this to happen. Carl Rollyson describes the character archetypes of Sherlock Holmes and John Watson of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's books as essential to the mass appeal of those books had upon audiences:

Many critics attribute Doyle's success in this series to his conceptions of Holmes, Watson, and their relationship... Holmes is passionate about solving problems and about little else... Yet his aloofness from ordinary life does not entirely exempt him from ordinary values. He cares touchingly for Watson and at least adequately for the innocent victims of crimes... This weakness in Holmes is counterbalanced in part by Watson. Holmes's interest in a case tends to end when the puzzle is solved and the culprit captured, but Watson's narratives often offer brief summaries of the subsequent lives of criminals and victims. Watson provides the more mundane human interest. Watson connects the reader to the strange and powerful genius of the detective.¹¹

Watson achieves this connection to the reader by being the voice through which the stories are told. An important aspect of the stories, as mentioned by Rollyson, is that "one of Watson's most important functions is to conceal what goes on in Holmes's head."¹² Sherlock never reveals the answer to a mystery until the case's conclusion. This characteristic of Sherlock Holmes drives

¹⁰ Keene, Carolyn. *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories no. 5: The Secret of Shadow Ranch* (Grosset & Dunlap, New York: 2000), 3.

¹¹ Rollyson, Carl. *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction* (Pasadena, California: Salem Press, 2008), 531.

¹² Rollyson, Carl. *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction* (Pasadena, California: Salem Press, 2008), 532.

his partner mad at times but Rollyson states that this quality is “essential to the dramatic power of the stories.”¹³ In addition, as a surrogate to Conan Doyle’s writing, Watson essentially becomes the author of these tales as he recounts the cases as they happened through his own writing.

I have come to these conclusions about Doyle’s two main characters: Sherlock’s role is to solve the mysteries, while Watson’s role is to listen and document the cases. Those are the two archetypes: the detective and the author. These archetypes partially align with screenwriter Blake Snyder’s description of a Buddy Love film. Blake Snyder was a screenwriter who wrote and lead workshops on the subject of story structure, film genres, and screenwriting. His book *Save the Cat* is one of the highest rated books on screenwriting and is an essential text in any screenwriter’s library. Snyder describes a Buddy Love film as a film where, “At first the “buddies” hate each other. However, their adventure brings out the fact that they need each other. They are, in essence, incomplete halves of a whole.”¹⁴

Examples buddy love films include *Rush Hour* (fig. 8), *Men in Black* (fig.9), and *Toy Story* (fig. 10) where the heroes are complete opposites but eventually must realize they need to work together to save the day. Where the *Sherlock Holmes* stories partially deviate from the formula is the characters do not necessarily ever hate each other, but the other hallmarks apply. In fact, Blake Snyder even states in *Save the Cat* that, “My theory is that the buddy movie was invented by a screenwriter who realized that his hero had no one to react to. There was just this big, empty space where interior monologue and description is found in fiction.”¹⁵

¹³ Rollyson, Carl. *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction* (Pasadena, California: Salem Press, 2008), 532.

¹⁴ Snyder, Blake. *Save the Cat* (Studio City, California: Michael Wiese Productions, 2005,) 35.

¹⁵ Snyder, Blake. *Save the Cat* (Studio City, California: Michael Wiese Productions, 2005,) 34.

Those sentences alone describe the Sherlock and Watson relationship where Watson's role is to be the person whom Sherlock converses. Sherlock does not necessarily need Watson's help to solve the case, but without Watson, there would not be a story to tell. With these character archetypes now identified, I could decide which role my characters Charlemagne and Orville would inhabit. Charlemagne the lobster would take the role of the detective, while Orville the clam would take the role of the author. Knowing that the foundation of the story is rooted in the mass serialization and commercialization of detective fiction, the story had finally come together.

If we conclude Orville's role is to document the cases, what would happen if Orville published the books in the same vein as the ghostwriters of the Stratemeyer Syndicate? What if books depicting Charlemagne and Orville's cases were a national phenomenon spanning hundreds of volumes? How would that fame and notoriety affect their partnership, where one is concerned with solving the mystery at hand and the other is concerned with writing books and building a brand? What if this story was actually the last book in Orville's book series and told through narration as Orville is in the process of writing it?

Just to throw a curve ball, what if we take all of those ideas and transplant them into an underwater world where the characters are a lobster and a clam in a city full of fish and other assorted sea-life? In what ways can I create comedy by injecting this human story into personified animal characters and how does their perception of the world affect the humor? Those questions are what my film addresses from a narrative standpoint through this research and exploration.

DESCRIPTIONS AND IMAGES OF THE ARTWORKS

As *Sea-Tectives* is a single work composed as an animated short film and it is important to discuss the key illustrations and moments throughout the film's nine-minute runtime. While it is a comedic detective story with an overarching mystery to be solved, the heart of the story is centered on the friendship of the principle characters Charlemagne Clawes and Orville Sinclair.

The film begins with an introductory sequence stylized as an old black and white television program from the early days of television (fig.11). As the sequence begins, the characters Charlemagne and Orville are introduced through an anonymous television program narrator. However, the mood shifts as this upbeat television program is suddenly turned off, revealing a lifeless television in a room inhabited by a single, solitary Orville. Charlemagne is nowhere to be found as this room is filled with the relics of the duo's happier times (fig.12). This scene is intended to inform the viewer that everything they currently know about the two detectives existed in the past. The walls are covered with old newspaper clippings and awards from their previous achievements and are covered with dust and algae. At this point, Orville begins to tell the story about their last case together within the context of writing one last novel.

My intent here is for the audience to believe that they are watching an old black and white film before the color and tone completely changes. Not only is the color and tone change significant in the opening sequence, but I also utilize a more limited animation style reminiscent of cartoons made in the 1940's. I am leading the viewer to create an expectation of what the story is about before I turn that expectation completely around. The purpose of this is to hook the audience by making them question what comes next. I believe that the best stories are told in a way that goes against the audiences' expectations so that the viewer desires to invest their time to see the story play out until the very end.

I have seen this method of flipping the audience's expectations previously in the opening sequence of the Trey Parker and Matt Stone film *Team America World Police* (fig. 13). That film opens with a crude puppet dancing about on a primitive stage waddling in front of a hastily painted backdrop of Paris. The camera slowly pans backwards to reveal that a larger marionette controls the crude marionette. The expectation established by the initial visual of the crude puppet is that the film is going to be a low budget, B movie affair, when in actuality there is more to the film than meets the eye. In the case of *Team America World Police*, the moment is met with laughter. In *Sea-Tectives*, the moment of flipped expectations is met with a more tragic tone as the stage is set for the inevitability that Charlemagne will eventually be lost to Orville. This knowledge of both Charlemagne and Orville's fates continues to linger in the viewer's minds, even though the film's more lighthearted and comedic moments.

The philosophical debate of the film is centered on Charlemagne and Orville's views on their growing fame as a result of the book series that Orville has written based upon their many adventures. While Orville revels in the popularity that his writings have brought the team, Charlemagne secretly loathes the newfound attention that the books have placed upon their detective work. This distraction prevents Charlemagne from satisfactorily doing his job due to the intrusion of the fans that flock to their investigation sites (fig. 14). This tension amplifies in a pivotal moment in the story where Charlemagne tears up a *Sea-Tectives* cardboard cutout advertisement in front of a local bookstore (fig. 15). The act of tearing up this image of Charlemagne and Orville together both symbolizes and foreshadows the eventual split of their partnership.

This image in (fig. 14) also serves to inform the visual painting style that I utilize for my film. This painting style is largely influenced by the background paintings in Genndy

Tartakovsky's *Samurai Jack* television program. To create the backgrounds I utilize simple shapes and color to establish the forms that make up the landscapes in place of realistically rendered objects. I use a combination of digital watercolor and oil textured brushes to paint over the simple shapes that I map out in my compositions beforehand. To create the appearance of buildings in the distance in this particular scene, I draw squares and rectangles in a variety of widths and colors to imply windows. The red and yellow coral are drawn and painted in single colors to contrast with the rest of the painting. I enjoy finding moments in each of my compositions to utilize bright and contrasting colors to create areas for the eye to fixate.

In the midst of their growing discontent with each other, the two detectives struggle to solve a case of fish disappearances throughout the city. All signs point to an alien abduction conspiracy at the root of the disappearances because the victims are seemingly pulled straight out of the sea. This is a fact that Charlemagne concludes and Orville rejects, thereby furthering the division between the two. In reality, the “aliens” are worms on a hook cast into the water by unseen fishermen residing in a boat overhead, as seen in the interaction in (fig. 16). This is the moment where the culprit is unmasked to the audience and the viewer feels the triumph of solving the mystery. The disappearances are a direct result of human interaction with this underwater ecosystem but because the fish have no knowledge of boats, worms, or fishermen, they conclude that the attacks are caused by an alien invasion. The fish's knowledge is clouded by their limited understanding of these beings that exist above the surface of the sea. The humor comes from Charlemagne's conclusion that there is an alien invasion taking place when the audience knows better. The result is that the audience gets to have an “ah ha!” moment as all the facts of the case now make sense. All that remains to be seen is how Charlemagne acts to put an end to the crisis with the knowledge that he has.

The climactic moment arrives when Orville meets Charlemagne at the edge of the ravaged city. Charlemagne has apprehended one of the worms and intends to use the hook to go above the surface of the water to end the invasion once and for all. By Charlemagne's logic, he is the only being who can stop the alien invaders because he does not have the irrational urge to bite the worms and, therefore, becoming hooked. He also concludes that he is the only one with claws to hang on to the hook, because clams do not have hands, and Orville will have to be left behind as he goes above the surface alone. This moment where Orville learns that Charlemagne intends to sacrifice himself for the good of their city is shown in (fig. 17). This is the emotional climax for Orville and the feelings register on his face. The cost of saving the city is the loss of his friend. It is not made clear what Charlemagne intends to do to combat whatever awaits him above the surface of the water, but the result of his sacrifice is that the boat floats away, thereby saving the city from further annihilation.

I intended my film to be a comedic take on the detective genre but I also wanted to have a deeply moving theme of friendship at the center of the story. When one pulls apart the detective fiction imagery and underwater setting, the story is about two friends who have major differences in philosophies that threaten to divide their partnership. However, the heroes realize the qualities that made them a great team to begin with and accept each other's point of view in order to save their city. It is this theme at the heart of the film that the audience can relate to, and elevates the film beyond the field of comedy and parody and into the realm of cinema.



Figure 1. Genndy Tartakovsky, *Samurai Jack*. 2001-2004, 2016.



Figure 2. Still from *Sealed with a Kiss*.



Figure 3. Early *Sea-Tectives* concept art.



Figure 4. Trey Parker, Matt Stone. Scene from *South Park* episode 116, “Awesom-O” April 14, 2004.

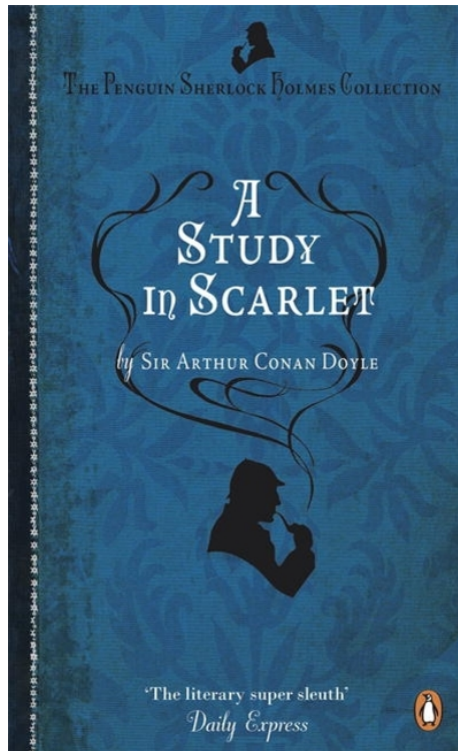


Figure 5. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*. 1887.

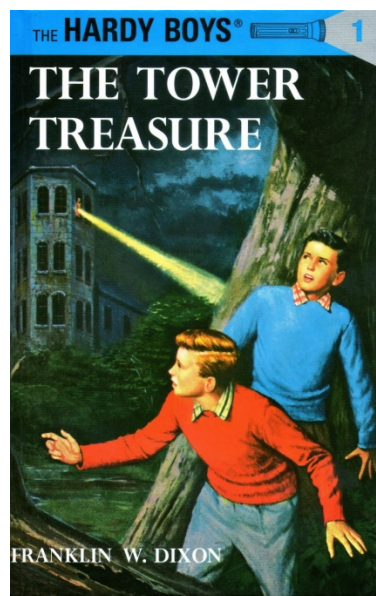


Figure 6. Franklin W. Dixon, *The Hardy Boys no. 1: The Tower Treasure*. 1927.

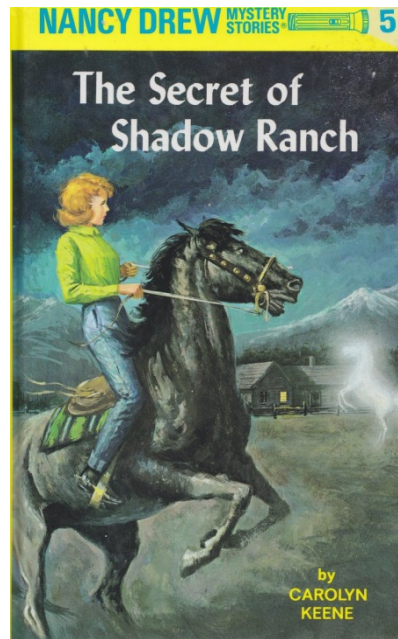


Figure 7. Carolyn Keene, *Nancy Drew Mystery Stories no. 5: The Secret of Shadow Ranch*. 1931.

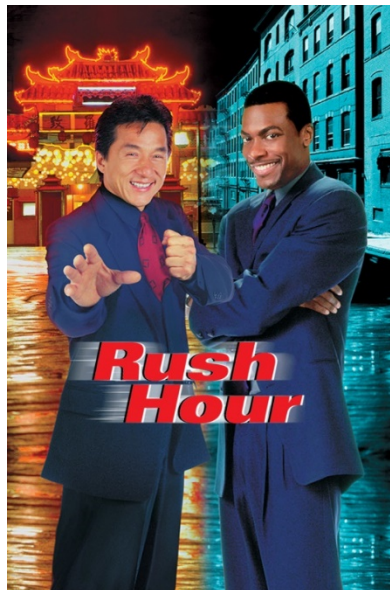


Figure 8. *Rush Hour*. 1998.



Figure 9. *Men in Black*. 1997.



Figure 10. *Toy Story*. 1995.



Figure 11. Still from *Sea-Tectives*.

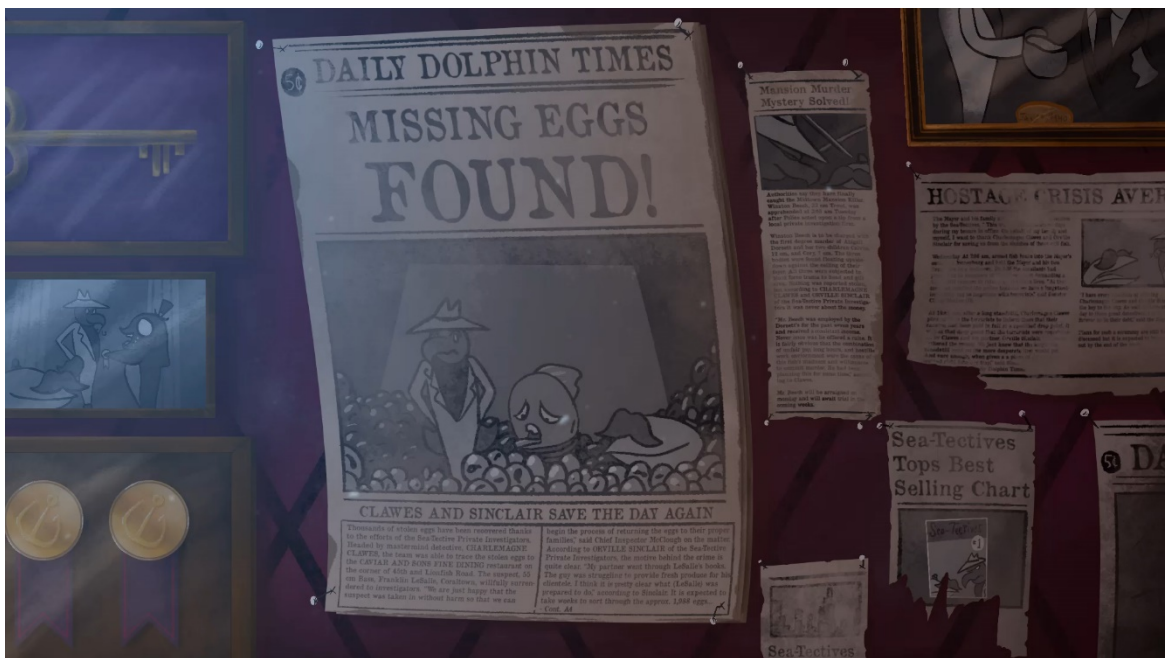


Figure 12. Still from *Sea-Tectives*.



Figure 13. *Team America World Police*. 2004.



Figure 14. Still from *Sea-Tectives*.



Figure 15. Still from *Sea-Tectives*.

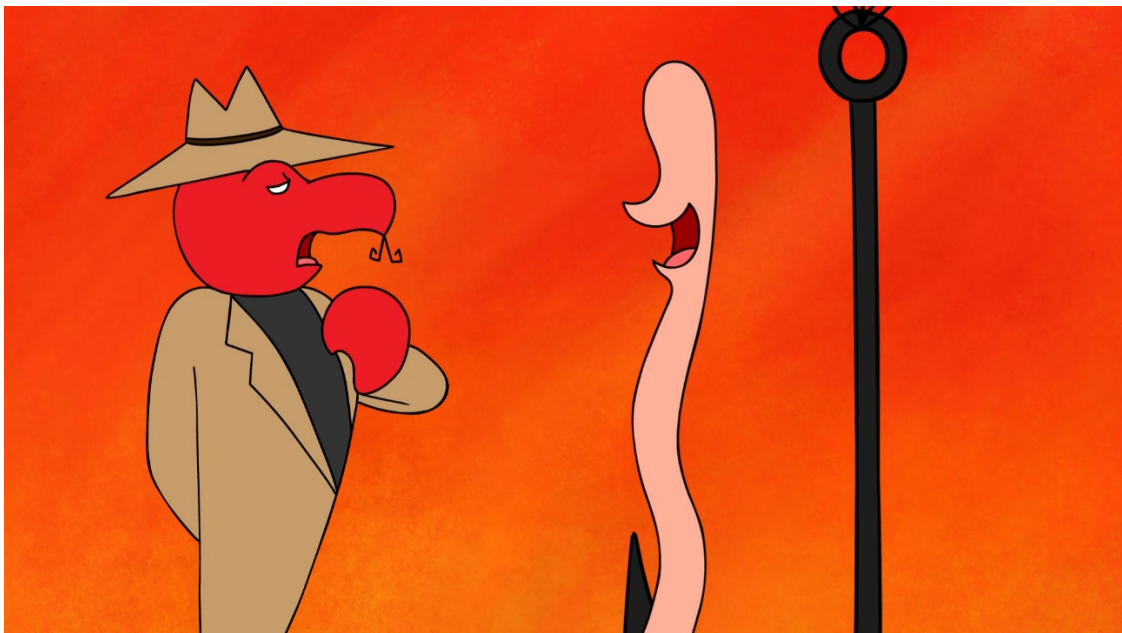


Figure 16. Still from *Sea-Tectives*.

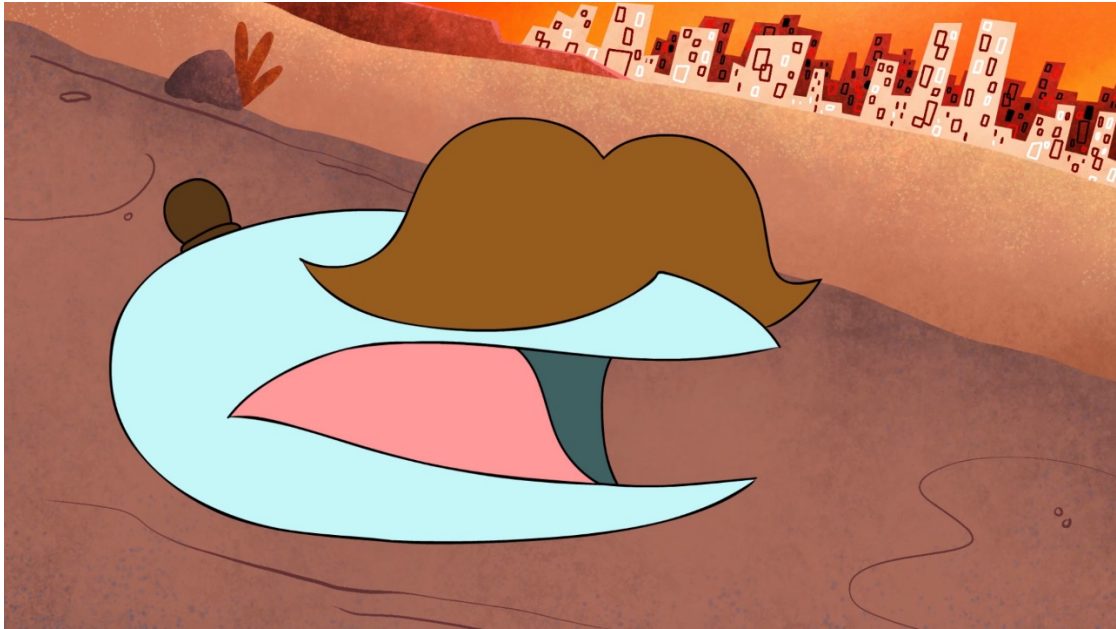


Figure 17. Still from *Sea-Tectives*.

CONCLUSION

Sea-Tectives is ultimately a comedic take on the detective fiction genre of stories. The serialization of mystery fiction literature and the character archetypes established through the principle characters of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories serves as the narrative foundation of the story. The film parodies these tropes and injects them into the context of an underwater world.

While I believe the primary function of an animated short film is to entertain, the research and development that went into creating this project elevates the film beyond entertainment and into the realm of cinema. By focusing the story on the relationship between two detectives whose partnership is suffering from their growing fame within their city, the audience is given a relatable problem that they strive to see resolved by the conclusion of the story. Resolution does not always turn out the way the audience wants or expects; they must see the story play out until the end. However, the goal of any storyteller is to see their audience rewarded at the conclusion of their story.

I believe that advancement and innovation of the medium is achieved through a continued state of creation. Animation styles and trends develop as more and more films are produced over time. Artists continue to analyze and emulate the artists that come before them; creating new approaches to production. This film serves as my contribution to the advancement of the animation medium. As a director, writer, storyteller, animator, and artist these contributions are ongoing as I create more and more films. Where this film stands apart from other animated short films is that it is a reflection of my creative process and, therefore, myself. My fingerprints are present throughout the production.

I acknowledge the vast influence that artists and animators in the past have bestowed upon me. If one person views my film and feels inspired to create one of their own, then I would consider that one of the greatest victories this production could achieve. I strive to be an animator who inspires artists to create in the same manner in which I was inspired as a child by the artists responsible for the media throughout my youth. I hope that in this manner that I may continue to add to the advancement of the animation medium.

EXHIBITION STATEMENT

Sea-Tectives is a ten minute animated short film starring Charlemagne Clawes the Lobster, and Orville Sinclair the Clam. The story chronicles the duo's final case together as they investigate a threat greater than any danger the ocean has ever known. The heroes come into conflict with their differing philosophies on their rising fame and celebrity status within their underwater society, which threatens to break their partnership apart. It is only when each accepts the value of the other that they realize that their friendship is more important than their cases or fame.

The film is inspired largely by the detective fiction genre pioneered by various book and television series, such as *Sherlock Holmes*, *The Hardy Boys*, *Nancy Drew*, and *Scooby Doo, Where Are You?* The comedy comes from parodying tropes and archetypes of mystery fiction, as well as film noir, and injecting them into the context of an underwater society, environment, and characters.

The film exhibits a traditional, two-dimensional animation aesthetic while utilizing digital means of production. Instead of drawing and painting on celluloid, as was the process revolutionized by many animators throughout the twentieth century, the animation was drawn and painted directly on the computer screen, or digital tablet. The result is an aesthetic that is reminiscent of cartoons made throughout the 1990s. This method of production is reflective of how animators in the industry work to this day with a technology medium that is rapidly evolving. I am responsible for the screenplay, animation, background painting, compositing, voice acting, and sound effects. Having my hands on each stage of the production process has been vital to my advancement as an artist and filmmaker.

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